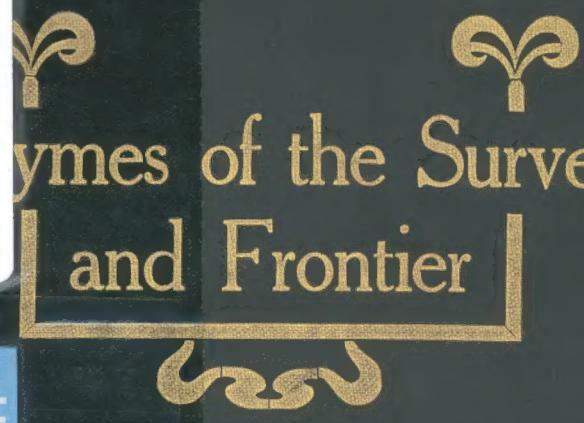


RHYMES OF THE SURVEY AND FRONTIER—FIELD

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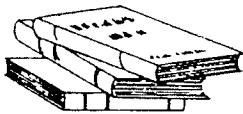


GEORGE B. FIELD



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Rhymes of the Survey and Frontier



BY
GEORGE BLACKSTONE FIELD

Toronto
William Briggs
1911

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by GEORGE B. FIELD

TO
MY FATHER
F. B. FIELD
AND MY FRIEND
C. D. MACKINTOSH

THE FORMER FOR HIS INTEREST
IN HIS SON'S LIFE ABROAD AND
THE LATTER FOR HIS KIND
INDULGENCE AND SYMPATHY.

“There is no more courageous body of men than those pioneers of civilization who, taking their lives in their hands, penetrate savage countries in the interests of commerce, to survey and open up the land.”
—*Cecil Rhodes, Rhodesia.*

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Rhymes of the Survey and Frontier

TO YOU WHO WILL UNDERSTAND

You, who have conquered the wilderness,
You, who are building the land,
You, whom I knew in the loneliness,
To you, who will understand,
Rhymes I have rhymed of the lonely ways,
Stories I tell o'er again—
Wandering days by the camp-fire's blaze,
Fancy and frolic and pain.

Far in the silence I seem to see
Shadowy forms in the mist,
Moulding the key of a land to be,
Steeled to its terrors resist;
Daring it all, where the shadows fall,
Lengthening far in the night;
Answering ever to nature's call,
Turning the darkness to light.

TO YOU WHO WILL UNDERSTAND

Many will follow, but you must lead
The way o'er the ancient clay,
Paying the price of a nation's need;
Comrades you leave by the way.
Yet in the future you see a land
Peopled and loved as a home;
Men who will listen and understand
Your work in the great alone.

Many have judged with a judgment stern
Your pleasures, which e'en are few;
Judging, with little desire to learn,
Of trials they never knew.
Yet you have chosen, and who shall say
Your choosing was not aright;
Willing to follow the silent way,
The way of the long, long night.

What will it matter, when comes the call
To enter the dim unknown?
What will it matter, when, after all,
You stand at the Master's throne?
Maybe I dream, but I often seem
Man's judgment to hear reversed;
“*I judge by not what you should have been,
'Tis strange you have not been worse.*”

TO YOU WHO WILL UNDERSTAND

So have I dreamed of the long ago,
Songs have I sung to your name;
Little of fancy, to you who know,
The cost of a nation's fame;
Memories dear to the men who roam,
Brothers I knew in the land;
Leaving the judgment to you alone,
To you, who will understand.

TO YOU WHO CAN NEVER UNDERSTAND

You've often, by your fireside, talked of people you have known,

The soldier, p'raps the doctor, or the priest;
These verses are of fellows, most of whom are never known,

On whom the limelight falls perhaps the least.

There's many who've forgotten, in the comfort of a home,

The boys whose lives are mingled with the wild;
Who leave the surging city, model out the great alone,
To hardness, for your pleasure, reconciled.

• • • • •

When, lying in your sleeper in a first-class Pullman car,

Or musing at the table while you dine,
The train is running swiftly on without a jolt or jar,
D'you ever think of those who made the line?

TO YOU WHO CAN'T UNDERSTAND

While rushing o'er the prairies, fresh with towns all
newly born,

The bush, the bridge across the Torrent's fall ;
And rounding mighty canyons in the hazy early morn,
Don't quite forget the boys who did it all.

We know you bought a ticket, and you pay for all you
get,

But don't you see the shadow near the pine,
Who looks at you appealingly, with face so white and
set,

For duty died, your comfort on the line.

Just turn your eyes to Westward, to the bluff that
shades the creek,

The sunset's glory setting overhead ;
We found him in the bushes, he'd been frozen near a
week,

His life, a pioneer, the man that's dead.

There's some who die of hunger, and there's others
rave in pain ;

The fever and the scurvy claim their due.

And many go to early graves, who might have gone to
fame.

Just think of us while in your family pew.

MEN OF THE LINE

Sons of the survey, sons of the wild, sons of the
prodigal son,
Chums of the lonely and ancient pine, standing eter-
nally dumb;
Knowing the cost of the words "To fail," staking the
way in the gloom,
Dreaming the dream in the dim unseen, daring its
ravenging doom,
Men who are known by the great alone, men who are
leading the way,
Fighting the fight in the long, lone night, loving the
lure of the fray;
Reckless and careless, but ever true, men of the track
and the mine,
Carving to-day 'midst the desert's sway, their names
on the sands of time.

Men with a home that is all in the world, men who
are fated to stay,
Roaming the West or the mighty North, building the
future to-day;
Drawing a hand when the world began, playing the
game that is set;

MEN OF THE LINE

Plans that were born on Creation's morn, wanderers
wandering yet.
Counting the stars in the Southern cross, sweltering
deep in the Rand;
Blanketed tight in the Arctic night, brothers reclaim-
ing the land.
Fighting a thirst in a land accursed, bringing it
honor and fame;
Shatt'ring its curse, and its fears disperse, men who
the wilderness tame.

Men who have chosen the lonely way, men who have
given the gift,
Living for us in the lands to come, men who are
lifting the mist;
Draining the land on a fevered strand, damming the
torrents that pour,
Leaving their brand on the desert sand, men who have
opened the door.

Men who have ravished the wilderness, men who have
followed the trail,
Men who are sleeping the dreamless sleep, far in the
innermost pale;
Never the chant of the abbey's choir, only the wolves
in the night,
Finding a tomb in the deathless gloom, men who have
finished the fight.

MEN OF THE LINE

What if they're careless—are we to judge slips that
they make in the game?

If we were men of a survey crew, God help us, we'd
do the same.

What if they sin? Are we free from that? If so, let
us throw the stone,

But few are the men who have kept the ten com-
mands from the ancient throne.

Men from the college or from the farm, men of the
wandering breed,

Men of the 'Varsity's honored roll, men whom the future
will need;

Men who are young, and have just begun, soon with
the wilderness blend,

Men who are grey in the work to-day, men who are
nearing the end.

Men still living yet men who are dead, men who are
buried at home,

Living afresh in the loneliness, men who forever must
roam;

Men with a name that is not the same as once in the
days gone by,

Men who have come with a secret dumb, men who have
severed the tie.

MEN OF THE LINE

We who have followed the beaten track, we who have chosen the home,
We who have never desired to stray, to fathom the mystic zone;
Spirits who dwell in a conquered sphere, deaf to the wandering call,
Honor the men of the wilderness, men who have given their all.

All for the years that are yet to come, sowers who never will reap,
Send thro' the darkness the call of dawn, waking eternity's sleep;
Hard in the hardness of harder things, hardness we never have seen,
Men who have finished the Master's work, bridging the space between.

We, who must reap of their toil to-day, harvesting seed they have sown,
Are we forgetting the price they paid, these heroes we've never known?
Are we neglecting the debt we owe, the debt we can ne'er repay,
Carelessly viewing their finished work, indifferently on our way?

MEN OF THE LINE

Sons of the Survey, sons of the wild, sons of the
prodigal son,
Boys who are treading the lonely way, fellows of whom
I have sung;
Let us remember the deeds they've done, leaving for-
ever their name,
Lettered in gold, and the story told, for aye on the
scroll of fame.

THE BREAKER OF THE TRAIL

(**The Spirit of the Land to the Old Pioneer**)

Out of the vastness I heard a voice
That echoed from sea to sea,
Singing the song of the olden years,
The song of the years to be;
Tender and sad, as it sought its way,
Through hovel to banquet hall,
Seeking for those who would understand,
The love of the mother call.

.

I see you in turreted mansions,
My children of long ago,
I see you as derelicts drifting,
As wrecks on the rivers flow;
And I call, with a soul o'erflowing,
Forsaken, but yearning yet,
To hold you again to my bosom,
The child I can ne'er forget.

THE BREAKER OF THE TRAIL

Long have I waited for your return
As faces have come and gone,
Long have I brooded o'er silent camps,
'Midst trails that your feet have worn:
Waiting in vain, for I see you now
Too old for the lonely trail,
And I in my sorrow must leave you,
My children, who did not fail.

Fain would I hold you close to my breast,
My child of the vanished years,
Where is the love that is true as mine,
Mingled with sorrowing tears?
Ah, how I miss you, mid'st faces new,
True, daring, but not the same,
'Tis you, ever you, who have left me
Alone who can soothe my pain.

When they shall come, and shall speak your name,
In honor, amid my gloom,
Then will I fight as a she-wolf fights,
To guard them against the doom;
For you were my children before them,
Your dreams shall be theirs again,
And I, whom you followed, will cherish
The men who shall breathe your name.

THE BREAKER OF THE TRAIL

Farewell, as I leave you in sorrow,
 Yet joy, for your stent is done;
Farewell, till I greet you through others
 Who further your toil begun.
O'er trails where we wrought together
 No more shall your footsteps wend,
But I in the silence shall wait you,
 Rewarding you at the end.

.

I saw the eye that was growing dim,
 Re-kindled with golden fire,
As memories wakened of long ago—
 The chords of the old desire;
I saw the figure, so bent and old,
 That soon must forever fall,
Gaze wistfully thro' the vanished years,
 Revering the mother call.

She warned the ones who should seek her ~~coasts~~
 Of perils and shadows drear,
Of the fears undreamed that o'ershadow
 The way of the pioneer;
She promised naught, but whatever
 Her children had sought before,
The hunger, silence, and p'raps the grave,
 Her legacies evermore.

THE BREAKER OF THE TRAIL

For the mother calls, and her sons obey,
Well knowing her love sincere,
That lures them on o'er the crag and fen,
Protecting them from the fear;
'Tis the men who know who are faithful,
When others have cursed her trails,
That her love is but for her children,
Her anger for he who quails.

*'Tis the mother call that lures you on,
As wanderers still you roam,
The mother call to the pioneer,
Inanimate, sad, alone;
'Tis the mother call, and you follow
The men who have wrought and gone;
'Tis the mother lovingly calling
The soul of her youngest born.*

THE RODMAN'S DREAM

I dreamed that the trumpet had sounded,
The Judgment we went to on high,
By bands of the angels surrounded,
We hurried away to the sky;
Some fellows wore scared-looking faces,
And some had a wondering look,
But stood all arranged in our places,
And watched as they opened the book.

We never had read much about it,
And seldom attended the kirk,
The judgment we heard, never doubt it,
Was, "Man should be judged by his work";
We hadn't done much we were proud of,
Except for the road or the mine,
But Mac said, if it was allowed of,
We'd build them a heavenly line.

The draughtsman was fitted with paper
They took from the memory book,
The transit and stand came from Peter,
Who down on the earth used to look;
The rod was supplied and a level,
With one other thing to get yet,
The chain we got loaned from the devil,
And hubs we proceeded to set.

THE RODMAN'S DREAM

We hunted the children of Israel,
And ordered them out on the line,
And Aaron, with Jonah and Ishmael,
All helped us to build it on time;
We fixed up the Ark for a cookshack,
Installing the devil as cook,
We knew he could fix up the hard tack,
From reading of him in the book.

We tore up the golden pavements,
And sighted through jasper walls,
Upsetting the angels' arrangements,
And shocking their ears with our calls.
Lot handled a back-flagging picket,
The rod Moses used at the rock,
And put a B.M. at the wicket,
Where incoming pilgrims would knock.

Mere Eve watched, with angels beside her,
As Adam the foreman we made;
And took the Pale Horse and his rider
To drive a machine on the grade.
I've worked on the C.P. and others,
And often seen queer-looking sights;
But laughed when the Zebedee brothers
Drove mules in the heavenly heights.

THE RODMAN'S DREAM.

King Solomon sent us a tender,
A house for the agent to build,
And Matthew, our legal defender,
Saw specifications were filled;
We put up a gold cantilever,
O'erspanning the Valley of Rest,
And hunted up old Shalmanezar,
For laying the steel in the West.

We worked, for we knew it depended
Where we should Eternity spend;
Our future we stoutly defended,
The line that we made at *The End*.
That grade never needed inspection,
Such filling we never had seen;
Pure silver and gold for a section,
With radium stuffed in between.

We showed, when the road was completed,
Our duty we never would shirk;
And the Master who viewed it repeated:
“That man should be judged by his work.”
He called up the saints of the ages,
To honor us with their esteem,
And pardoned our past-blotted pages—
When I woke, and I found 'twas a dream.

THE MUSTERING OF THE LEGION

(To the Legion of Frontiersmen)

*'Twas a dream that I dreamed of to-morrow,
A shadow was cast before,
And the men who were missing had gathered
To answer the call to war.
Did ye think they were dead to the Empire?
Ah, no, though their trail is dim!
On the roll of the Legion you'll find them,
The Frontiersmen of the King.*

I dreamed that a land was in sore distress,
I dreamed of a great review,
And the frontiersmen from across the sea
Had gathered, a motley crew;
For the word had flown to the rolling stone
That perilled was England's name;
From the North and South, to the East and
West
They listened, and then they came.

THE MUSTERING OF THE LEGION

They came from the north, the Alaskan coast,
They came from the White Man's Grave,
The men of the ranch and the mounted police,
In company with the knave;
Forgetting it all at the nation's call,
Unmindful of aught beside,
They were needed there, there were none to
spare,
In stemming disaster's tide.

Not a smile was seen, as the strange array
Was mustered, and still they came
From the Southern Cross and the midnight
sun,
The desert and from the plain;
They came from the mountains and Grosvenor
Square,
The trapper beside the knight,
The men of the jungle and Labrador,
In eagerness for the fight.

They came in detachments, they came alone.
They paid or they worked their way,
In moccasins, chaps, or in overalls,
The young with the old and grey:
Their law was the law of the *Forty-four*,
And grimly across the waves
They came, for the King was in need of them,
His men of the damn-fool trades.

THE MUSTERING OF THE LEGION

They came from the mist of a future dawn,
The lands of to-morrow's sun;
The lands that in exile and weariness
Had awaited the man to come.

They came from the shade of a Moslem
mosque,
The desert of long-ago;
These men who had welcomed the Legion's
call,
Their loyalty e'en to show.

They came from the shanty and lumber camp,
They came from a prairie shack,
The office and camp of the engineers,
The Irishman and the Mac;
They came from the land of the Golden Fleece,
And far from an Indian shore,
Obeying the word that was passed along,
The Frontiersman's call to war.

For the call had reached, God alone knew
how,
And Britons beyond the seas
Caught its wailing cry, as it passed them by,
Borne on by the evening breeze;
In the fevered zone, or the Northern home,
O'er wilderness, dark and bare,
It spoke, and its note was o'er-pregnant,
With weariness, pain, and care.

THE MUSTERING OF THE LEGION

Then I seemed to be in a land of strife,
With Britain against the wall,
Where the pride of an empire was falling
For ever beyond recall;
And the flag that had waved in its glory
Was drooping amid the gloom.
'Twas the end, and I fancied I heard it,
The song of Britannia's doom.

But its notes were hushed, as with vengeance
flushed,
In anger, the Legion came,
Like a surging sea, for a moment free,
Avengers of England's fame;
And the flag was saved, but the lonely graves
Recorded the price they paid,
Ere the work of the Legion was ended,
The doom of an Empire stayed.

And, then, thro' the mist of 'the cordite's
gloom,
I saw them return again,
But many who gathered were missing now,
And others were streaked with pain;
For the desert would grieve for her children,
The plains would resound no more
With the voices of they who were sleeping
Afar on that awful shore.

THE MUSTERING OF THE LEGION

They turned them again to the wilderness
Like shadows amid the night,
Away to the silence and lonely camp,
For ever from England's sight;
But they heard the call, and the ones to fall
Remembered throughout their pain,
When the King was in need of their service
The King had not called in vain.

.

*Would ye know them, these men of the Legion?
Then seek where the trails divide;
In the gloom they are waiting the message,
Recalling them to your side.
When the squares shall be shattered and
broken.
And victory's songs are stilled,
Then the dream that I dreamed of to-morrow,
The dream shall be e'en fulfilled.*

THE DESERTED COAST

(A Story of the Suez Canal)

Alone, yes, alone, a deserted coast,
Though once I was lord of all;
A king, and a fear, in the Southern Sea,
To men who obeyed my call.
Yet long was my reign, and my triumphs
great,
In days that are dead and gone;
And now I am waiting, my voices dumb,
A giant of my glory shorn.

I know they are passing me in the North
By way of the great canal,
And mocking the passage around the Cape,
Where I and my victims dwell;
Forsaken, undone, but I wait my chance,
With wanderers, sorely pressed,
The ones who at last will my boundaries pass,
To fall on my waiting breast.

THE DESERTED COAST

Alone, but for one who will ever sail,
 For aye in my mighty grasp;
The Dutchman, who, trying to round my coast,
 Was felled by my raging blast;
For the story's true of the spectral crew
 Who wander amid the gloom,
While my surges sing a deathless hymn,
 The song of the Dutchman's doom.

He'd a mighty ship, and he dared my wrath
 With haughty contempt and pride,
And a scornful sneer, which I turned to fear
 As vainly escape he tried;
Well I knew his woe, as he tried to go,
 In spite of my raging storm,
With a bragging curse, which could not
 disperse
 The fear that was in him born.

How I drew him on, and the moonlight shone
 On faces so drawn and white,
And I mocked the care that was written there
 Aloud in my wild delight;
There was naught to save from my waiting
 grave,
 I watched them, as one by one
To my rest were borne, in the early morn,
 Believing their work was done.

THE DESERTED COAST

Then a fancy came, for my future fame,
To tell of their deathless doom,
So I sent the ship in its ceaseless trip,
A phantom amid the gloom;
And the story's spread of the restless dead—
They call it the ship of hell—
But I held it fast, when the others passed
Away to the great canal.

For the Dutchman said that, alive or dead,
He'd conquer amidst the storm,
And I've heard them tell, in the depths of
hell,
Of spectres that then were born;
They with me agreed he should ne'er be freed
Till proving his reckless vow;
And he's sailing yet, with his royals set.
In anguish I see him now.

If he knew the way of the ships to-day,
From Suez they mock me still,
If he knew the passage that men have made
His boast he could e'en fulfill.
If he knew his vow could be proven now
How gladly he'd say farewell,
But he'll never know that he's free to go
By way of the Great Canal.

THE RHYME OF THE ROLLING STONE

“The stone that rolleth ne’er shall find
The moss, no substance make,”
Was written by the prophet old,
Who words of wisdom spake;
But, shadowed ’midst its shady bed,
The stone of mossy store
Is useless for the work of man,
And rotten to the core.

The moss the hoard, and man the stone—
Methinks the semblance good,
And rolling stones shall find no moss,
Is wisdom understood;
But where the voice of Empire calls,
The moss is parched and dry,
And we are rolling on our way
Beneath a burning sky.

’Twas planned and modelled from the
first,
That we should pioneer,
That we should know the hunger, and
The desert’s nameless fear;

THE RHYME OF THE ROLLING STONE

And from the East unto the West,
 You find the rolling stone
Is playing still a useful part
 For you, who stay at home.

You'll find us where, in purple hue,
 The shadows slant the sand,
As riveters of Empire, we're
 The fellows you have damned;
You'll find us where the Islam priest
 Is chanting at the dawn,
Or throwing out the challenge, on
 A crystal Arctic morn.

You'll find us running surveys on
 Creation's ragged end,
Or camping in the desert, where
 The past and future blend;
We're busy building railways on
 The map's deserted spot,
Or staking out an empire in
 The land that God forgot.

We haven't failed, tho' p'raps we're not
 As steady as the rest,
But still we play the game that's set
 The player's skill to test;

THE RHYME OF THE ROLLING STONE

We often curse the deal that made
 Us wand'lers in the land,
But not a man who's known the game
 Would ever change his hand.

So spurn ye not the polished stone
 For one of mossy coat,
For some must roll the wilderness,
 And some must roll afloat;
And some are making of the moss—
 Your harvest p'raps was sown
By he you brand for ever as
 A useless rolling stone.

MY SENTINELS

(The Song of the Wild)

Rugged and dark are my paths to fame,
Shadowed by men who have gone,
Buried, but rising to point the way
To he who shall seek the dawn;
Haggard and grey, be ye not afraid,
But greet with a fearless hand
The shapes that await in the silence,
My sentinels of the land.

Hasten their rest, be ye undismayed,
For weary and tired they be,
And long have they waited your coming,
For ever to set them free;
From a vigil long in the stillness,
To you, who are of the brand,
They call, they are waiting your answer,
These Sentinels in the land.

Don't you hear their cry? It is pregnant
With weariness; will you go?
For theirs was the price of an Empire,
And theirs was the seed to sow;

MY SENTINELS

And theirs were the dreams of a nation,
Ah, will ye not understand
That ye were begotten to follow
My Sentinels in the land!

Will ye take the hand that they offer?
Or else will ye mock their pain?
Will ye heed the wail from the silence?
For, hark, 'tis the call again;
In the land of ages and myst'ry,
Your love they will e'er requite,
And there shall ye find of my treasure,
'Midst Sentinels of the night.

THE BONNETS

It takes a lot to make a world, all classes and all
kinds,
But where the flag is flying now, a fellow always finds
A figure that's familiar, and a work that's ever new,
A little Army bonnet and a uniform of blue.

We've toughed it in the Yukon, and we've surveyed
o'er the plain,
And been where easy comfort is a thing you'd seek in
vain,
But ever where the hardest was, we'd see the worker
true,
A little Army bonnet and a uniform of blue.

'Way up on old Bonanza, ere we surveyed out the line,
Where hell was throned in glory, ruby lights and devil's
wine,
There stood a sacred cottage, and a home it was for
two,
Two little Army bonnets and the uniforms of blue.

THE BONNETS

They didn't have a fancy church, with organ and a
choir,
And didn't always talk about the judgment and the
'fire,
But, seeking out the worst that were, they started them
anew
To climb the ladder where they fell, those angels
dressed in blue.

It wasn't long before we saw a change was taking place,
And brutish looks were vanishing from many a
hardened face,
And seeds were planted deep in hell, which up to
heaven grew,
By little Army bonnets in Salvation Army blue.

We play the game and never tame, and never settle
down,
And on our many weaknesses our better brothers
frown,
Although we seldom read the Book, we know it must
be true,
For once we met its angels, *in a uniform of blue.*

THE ANSWER

Have you ever cursed at the Master's work, when life's
been a sort of hell?
If so, then perhaps you will understand the story I'm
going to tell;
There are chaps you know who have never seen the
edge of a thing called life,
And have never known of the challenge thrown in the
darkness of the strife.

There's a land we knew in the days of old, when we
trudged the wilderness,
'Twas the land of pain, with the brand of Cain, the
home of the loneliness;
We had cursed it oft with the blackest curse, a
reckless and godless lot,
And headed our letters for going home, "the country
that God forgot."

We had all been out since the early Spring, and things
had been going wrong,
And it seemed misfortune had dogged our trail each
day, as it dragged along;

THE ANSWER

It appeared to be as an alien land, forsaken by God
and man,
Till we heard the voice of the one who gave it birth
when the world began.

We had cursed that day more than e'er before, as
fellows in anger do,
And a storm that gathered above us broke, soaking us
through and through;
As we tramped it back to the lonely camp, it seemed
that place was banned,
And Brown with an awful curse had said "The devil
controls the land."

Then the thunder rolled, and the lightning flashed,
with its wondrous lurid glow,
And we who had challenged the wilderness wandered
the earth below.
It seemed that a message was from above, the know-
ledge of endless things,
The power that quickens the soul of man, and models
the hearts of kings.

I remember as though 'twere yesterday, the lesson we
learnt that night,
The answer that broke on our startled ears, the voice
from the riven height.

THE ANSWER

The God we had challenged with angry words was
guarding and watching yet,
And loving the wilderness we had cursed, the God who
could not forget.

He knew of the lonely location crew, away in the
shadowed past,
He knew of the road we had come to build, reserving
it to the last.
He knew we would say He had long forgot the arid
and thirsty land,
But spoke from the heavens that night to show t'was
even as He had planned.

RECALLED

Where the mountains rise in splendour,
And the shadows darkly fall,
And the torrent rushes o'er the silent glen,
Where the coyote's bark is wailing
With its never-ending call,
How I miss my home among the lonely men.

Left it all because they called me,
Left it all a year ago.
Tried to think the things of home could satisfy.
Changed the silence for the glitter
Of a city's empty glow.
Tried to crush my soul of things that never die.

Things that were and ever shall be,
Things that never, never change.
Things that men I see around can never know.
Things I know and love for ever,
Thro' my wand'ring vision range,
Things that whisper in the silence "You must go."

RECALLED

You who've never heard them calling,
Pleading voices in the night,—
You who've never known the challenge of the wild,
Cannot know the aching longing
For the freedom and the fight
When the loneliness is calling for her child.

There's a trail that lies a-waiting
In a dim and aged land.
There are monuments unbuilded in the gloom.
There are epitaphs unwritten,
Sleeping men who understand,
There's a challenge, there's a fight against the doom.

When the wild is closing on you,
And defiance you have hurled,
And the trail is fading dimly in the night,
As the mystic lights are dancing
On the frontier of the world
You are fighting grim and silent for your life.

When you're staking on the limit
With a hope that's nearly gone,
Then you grit your teeth and bluff the wild again,
Till you see the lights a-gleaming
In the coulee thro' the storm,
And you shout a mocking triumph thro' your pain.

RECALLED

There's an awful, awful stillness,
There's a something, God knows what,
There's a recklessness that, born, can never die.
There's a voice you try to silence
Of the thing that once you sought,
There's a longing in your heart you can't deny.

Far away amid the shadows
Of the future and the past,
Where the Mother waits the breaking of the day
When her lands shall rise in splendour
And her love be known at last,
She is calling, and I know I must obey.

WOODEN MIKE

(The Rhyme of the Old Cook)

There are things you dream,
And they often seem
To have happened real and true,
And the story which
I am going to pitch
He told while he stirred the stew.
He had got his name
When at first he came
To cook on a grading pike,
He had just one leg
And a lumber peg,
So they called him Wooden Mike.

The things he had done
With his traps and gun,
Were wonderful to relate.
But strangest of all
Was once in the fall,
This story I heard him state.

WOODEN MIKE

He had gone that fall,
At an urgent call,
To cook for a lumber firm,
Where he worked so quick
That he had to lick
His hands so they wouldn't burn.

When he fried the cakes,
That a fellow makes
For breakfast, the griddle style,
To have worked the way
That they do to-day
Would have taken quite awhile.
So he hired a man
For to grease the pan,
Its size would be hard to beat;
And the guy would skate
Right across the plate
With bacon rinds on his feet.

Now I wondered much
As I thought of such,
And asked him about the fire;
The amount it took
For the stuff to cook,
The fuel that it would require.

WOODEN MIKE

So he scratched his head
As he quietly said
The amount he'd clean forgot,
But he understood .
That he used more wood
Than ever the comp'ny got.

When he made his pie
He would never try
To finish them one by one;
With an oven large
As a young garage,
The baking was quickly done.
With his pies all lined,
And the man behind,
They close to the oven drew,
He would throw the pie
To the other guy,
Which baked as it travelled through.

He'd a cycle path
That was made of lath
Where the men at dinner sat,
And the waiter rode
With a ready load
Of eatables on his back.

WOODEN MIKE

He was soaked with grease,
But he couldn't cease.
For washing to think about,
So he lined his bunk
With some sandy junk
To keep him from slipping out.

He had lost his leg,
While at sea he said—
Got wrecked on a desert isle,
Where the cannibals,
And the animals
Had given themselves the bile.
They had tried to eat
Some of Mike's own meat,
And one of his legs prepared,
But they found the stuff
Was exceeding tough,
So that's why his life was spared.

Now I don't ask you
To believe it's true,
For Mike was a bad old man,
I with him agreed,
For to get a feed,
Believing it like a lamb.

THE SPECTRE

*They call it the Prairie Madness.
Beware as you enter its lair,
For many have started in gladness.
But few can the loneliness bear.*

• • • • •

Desolate, lonely, forsaken, deserted for many a year,
The joy of a soul in its building, with its hopes, lie
buried here;
For the grim old shack has a story that few but the
winds ever know,
The man who lived for its building, the man who was
wrecked in its woe.

Bringing his logs from the mountain, toting them
over the plain,
Never a thought of his danger, smiling again and again,
Thinking of her who would help him, watching his
work as it grew,
Speaking aloud in the silence the things that he meant
to do.

THE SPECTRE

Fretting alone through the winter, planning his plans
 all anew,
Wondering why in the silence shapes in his memory
 grew.
Trying to crush out the Spectre, still by his side it
 would lurk,
Humming the snatch of a chorus, hymns he had sung
 in the Kirk.

Cooking his sol-a-try supper, dreaming of days that
 should come;
Love that his soul could not utter held him unspeak-
 ably dumb,
Trying to pierce through the shadows, oft that would
 darken his brain,
Laughing because of the fancies, following on in their
 train.

Working alone for the future, thinking his waiting was
 o'er;
Sending for her o'er the ocean, welcoming her at the
 door;
Cursing the mists all around him, gleefully hemming
 him in;
Sneaking his way round a corner, grinning the maniac's
 grin.

THE SPECTRE

Taken one morn by the Sheriff, cursing and raving
and wild,
Songs he had sung in his schooldays, prayers he had
learned as a child,
Raving of her who awaited his message from over the
sea,
Living a death in the darkness, never again to be free.

*Far in the heart of a city, waiting a message in vain,
Asking each day of the postman, lining her forehead
with pain,
Wondering why he had left her, drooping each day as
it passed,
Carried one morn to the churchyard, knowing the
answer at last.*

SUNNY LTD.

Funny a fellow always sees, wherever he may stray,
The same old sun his people see, some thousand miles
away.

Pity a genius can't invent—the thing would surely
pay—

A rapid transit vehicle attached to Solly's ray.

Many a plunger would be found who'd organize the
scheme,

For travelling would be quicker far than "twenty per" by steam.

It's just a fancy, but to me it seems the missing link,
To couple up the hemispheres, of which they never
think.

Professors think of radium, and devil-wagon things,
A washer that the clothing automatically wrings.
I offer this suggestion, it's a winner barring none—
A thousand miles a minute *with a trailer on the Sun.*

UNFORGOTTEN

Dreamer of yesterday, sleep thy sleep;
 Rest, for thy stent is done!
Sower of seed, though not thine to reap—
 Harvest of years to come.
Hear us from far in Rhodesia's hills,
 Echoing round Groote Schur.
Treading to-day the united way,
 Briton beside the Boer.

Rhodes, thou art sleeping, but dost thou know
 Thine is a dream fulfilled?
Briton and Boer to the end shall go,
 Brothers as thou hast willed.
Thine was the strife, but the sun has set
 On mis'ry, hate and war;
Ours to forget and as comrades trek,
 One nation for evermore.

THE COMING OF THE LINE

'Twas only the land when we saw it,
 Unfettered, unharnessed and free,
Awaiting the will of the Master,
 Who the future alone could see.
Long before ere the cold Egyptian
 Had fashioned the Sphinx in the East,
Growing old ere the death of Adam,
 And the flood on the Earth had ceased.

Which survived through Jehovah's vengeance,
 When the glaciers crashed and roared.
The chosen of earth in their dwelling
 High over the mountain soared.
It welcomed the dove with an olive,
 The herald of peace in the land,
And succored the few as a parent,
 God's few from a dissolute band.

Knowing nought of the fall of kingdoms
 And palaces razed to the dust,
But awaiting through endless ages
 The future with infinite trust.
Well knowing afar in the future
 Were men who its beauty should see;
The men who would honor its waiting,
 The men who as brothers would be.

THE COMING OF THE LINE

And knew when the Pole was a comrade,
Instead of a lurking den
That guarded its mighty secret
Away from the eyes of men;
Which beckoned the brave when they sought it,
Alluring them on to their doom;
To mock them, their quest unaccomplished,
Deserting them far in the gloom.

But welcomed the few when it saw us,
And glad that its waiting had passed.
By yielding itself to our moulding;
The first of the lands and the last.
And broke, with the song of its freedom,
The silence that long held it dumb:
“I’ve waited and waited and waited!
The men I awaited have come!”

It told us of those who before us
Had sought it, abusing its trust.
But knowing the Maker’s decision,
Had levelled them, dust to the dust.
And knew through the ages of dreaming,
The day we its silence should end.
Give us, as a bride to her husband,
Her honor to love and defend.

THE COMING OF THE LINE

It knew we would shatter its secret,
Forever its beauty would blight;
But knew that the promise was given,
"At evening it shall be light."
And after the ages of waiting,
Surrendered itself to our hands
To fall as a child in the making,
To rise as a king in the lands.

Accepting the trust that it gave us,
And doing our best to fulfill
The plans that were laid in Creation,
Obeying the Master's will.
We gave it the child of its fancy,
Instructions we took at its hand.
The line we surveyed in location,
The track that we built in the land.

Some say that the end is approaching,
The desert shall bloom as the rose;
And back it with sundry quotations,
Selected from Biblical prose.
So we further Creation's purpose,
The eve of Eternity's dawn
When the Master shall say "It is finished,"
And Gabriel blows his horn.

MY PAL

The Rhyme of the Old Pioneer

You're old and you're dirty, I know.
You've laid in the mud and the snow.

 Were you ever so old,
 And whatever the cold,
Your dirt had a treasure below.

When grub and the water was low,
You'd ever your faithfulness show.

 And you'd never complain,
 When again and again
The blizzards would over us blow.

We've travelled together, I've said;
You've followed wherever I've led.

 And you never have failed,
 On the path we have trailed,
My dirty old comf'table bed.

THE UNASKED QUESTION

We ask them "When?" and "Where?" but
never "Why?"

In the land of new beginnings, there's a question never
asked,

There are reasons into which we never pry.

Silent men who seek our friendship with a page for-
ever passed,

They have come, we never seek to ask them "Why?"

They have come, and why, no matter, they have come,
'tis all we ask,

Where the fences fade from view we take their hand.
Vessels marred within the moulding, men we turn
them out at last,

Hard and daring, sealed forever with the brand.

Some have drunk the dregs of pleasure, some have
stroked a winning eight—

Drifting derelicts, they seek the lonely way.

One by one they swell the number, one by one, the toys
of fate

One by one ye knew them once—'twas yesterday.

THE UNASKED QUESTION

We are men of many nations, but what matter blood
or creed

When you're packing o'er a wilderness of snow?

Brothers e'en as God has made us, wanderers, 'twas so
decreed,

Brothers, builders, in the lands of long ago.

Some have spent the long vacation, some have come to
ne'er return;

Saint and sinner, fool and felon, rich or poor,

Seek the world's deserted places and the lessons there
to learn,

In the land of new beginnings evermore.

Hard as hell, yet sweet as heaven, cursed by those who
love it best,

Grim, unyielding in its law, the law of man,

Some have said good-bye forever, shrinking e'en before
the test,

Others stay and learn to love and understand.

We are parted for a season—in that season one has gone
For to sit beneath the upper chamber's dome.

Why he came is still his secret, but the man in him
was born

As he sought and trailed with us the great alone.

THE UNASKED QUESTION

He's the goal of seeking mammas, he's the idol of the
fair,

With his past transgressions buried out of sight.
He's forgot his beans and bacon in a theatre supper's
glare,
And his days he's mostly living in the night.

Still we took him as a comrade, asking nothing, judg-
ing less,

One of many whom you send us o'er the foam.
O'er the singing sands of Egypt, to the Northland's
icy breast,
In the lonely lands the past to e'en atone.

So we never ask them questions, for the story's e'er the
same,

But before the dying campfire's dusky glow
In the silence they have told us how they played and
lost the game;
Why remember? E'en forget, 'twas long ago.

THE PRICE OF THE LINE

Only three and a starving dog, surveying, my God!
my God!

And all the rest who had started were lying beneath
the sod.

All gone but three, the three of us, it couldn't be very
long

Before the wild would sing again its cursedly mocking
song.

It seemed as though we once had dreamed of the care-
less survey crew

Who started in the summertime with cares that are
ever few—

The reckless men who tame the wild, encamping around
its throne;

We tried to think, but gave it up and waited the end
alone.

We struggled when at first it came, the foe that had
dogged our trail;

But struggling turned to weariness; we knew that we
soon must fail.

The very atmosphere seemed full of death in its every
form,

And one by one the fellows to Eternity's rest were
borne.

THE PRICE OF THE LINE

A teamster started back for help; we wondered it never
came.

Found frozen in the wilderness, his horses had fallen
lame.

The wolves or devil's imps from hell had scented him
in his plight;

Watching him far in the silence, fighting his desperate
fight.

Young Johnson was the first to go; we buried him by
the hill,

Farewelling to endless silence, the boy lying quiet and
still.

The first, I said! God in Heaven, how many have gone
since then!

An axeman made the number nine, the transitman
made it ten.

With caches burned and water bad, and fever upon
our trail,

We tried to return ere winter would grip us within
the veil.

Wondering who was selected, soon to have yielded the
price,

The price of a nation's comfort, a deal with the loaded
dice.

THE PRICE OF THE LINE

At last 'twas only Joe and me with Cromarty and the
pup,
With faces soft as putty and a hope we had given up.
I thought of Green whom we'd never seen since start-
ing away for help,
And wondered if our bones they'd find in Spring when
the snow should melt.

When at last we could fight no more, blinded and
fevered and ill,
Envying little Johnson, who was sleeping beside the
hill,
We stretched our hands and tried to speak; forever
good-bye we said,
Surrendering to the wilderness, and praying we'd soon
be dead.

Looking back over all the years, it seemed that I died
that night,
Leaving the silence and anguish, the moon that was
shining bright.
Found by an Indian trapper, cared for by hearts that
were true,
Wresting us far from the shadow, nursed by the squaws
of the Sioux.

THE PRICE OF THE LINE

Sitting to-day in a smoker, viewing the oldest survey,
Don't feel inclined to discredit things I have tried to
portray.

God only knows of the hardness, blizzards that robbed
us of sight,
Stumbling on with an effort, turning the day into
night.

This is the story of fellows lying afar in the gloom,
The fellows who never faltered, e'en on the edge of the
doom.

Trying to smile through the fever, knowing the finish
had come;
Giving their lives in the service, losing the fight they
had won.

THE HOME TRAIL

*When you've tired of trails and treasure,
Drunk the dregs of pain and pleasure,
And you're camped beside the firelight all alone,
Have you heard the voices murmur'ring
Things that set your soul a-yearning,
Looked a-slantways at the trail and dreamed of home?
Have you seemed to see the faces,
Midst the awful lonely places,
Of the ones you love the best grow sad and old,
Who have waited, prayed and trusted,
While you've sought and fought and lusted
For the tinselled, luring treasure men call gold?*

Gold you've sought, and gold you've squandered,
As the world your feet have wandered,
While your folks in nightly rev'rence breathed your
name.
Now you seem to hear them speaking,
“Father, safe into Thy keeping,
Take our boy, and bring him safely home again.”
As you dream, the vision's alt'ring,
And you see a figure falt'ring
To the rustic gate where last you said goodbye.
Patient eyes the years are dimming,
Through your soul her cry is ringing,
“Oh, my boy, just once again before I die!”

THE HOME TRAIL

Through the mist of mem'ry's waking
Things you've long forgot are breaking,
Scenes reflected in the campfire's lonely glow.
As you curse the lonely places,
Long for old familiar faces,
In the world you left a wand'rer long ago.
Calling: "Leave it all behind you,
Snap the lonely thongs that bind you,
They are waiting in the village o'er the foam."—
Ghostly voices softly murmur'ring,
As from wilderness you're turning,
And your snowshoes print the backward trail for
home.

"Twas a dream, but now you're speeding,
For you've heard the whispered pleading,
And all else is fading far into the gloom.
With your pulses madly throbbing,
"Mother, don't, ah, don't be sobbing,
I've remembered, and I'm coming to you soon."
Trail by day, far in the twilight,
Camping, still, beneath the starlight,
Leaving far behind a dim and lonely land,
Till you see the white cliffs gleaming,
Where it's home, and past the dreaming,
As you watch the wavelets breaking on the sand.

THE HOME TRAIL

As you see the ivy clinging,
Hear the robin-redbreast singing,
And the land you left is still the same to-day;
Midst the scenes you've dreamed of often,
As the whisp'ring breezes soften,
For a moment desp'rare years are rolled away.
While the crimson sun is setting,
Trails and hardness you're forgetting,
For beside the rose-wreathed cottage on the hill,
'Neath the locks that years are whit'ning
Loving eyes are softly bright'ning,
In the home land there's a welcome for you still.

*P'r'aps you know that back you'll wander,
To the lone land over yonder,
In the birth of nations still a parl you'll play.
And perhaps be glad to listen,
When the voice demands submission,
Turn again and wander exiled on your way.
But you catch a whispered murmur'ring,
"Dad, thank God our boy's returning."
Closely clasp the feeble figures to your breast.
God, it's all that really matters,
And her voice the fancy shatters,
For the trail has led you home, a-while to rest.*

YESTERDAY

There's a land we knew in the days gone by,
 And builded our castles there.
There are trails we trod in the dawning light,
 With never a thought of care.
There were dreams we dreamed, there were plans we
 planned,
 But lingered upon our way.
As we trod midst a halo of glory
 The morning of yesterday.

For our hearts were light, and the way was bright,
 What matter the day was long.
Cloudless years were ours, and the shady bowers
 Re-echoed our blithesome song.
At the warning cry, as they passed us by,
 We mocked, for our hearts were gay—
Solemn plodders who passed us at noontide,
 The noontide of yesterday.

Did we linger long, ah, 'twas sweet to do
 To-morrow, we said with pride.
For the way was steep, and we laid to sleep
 And dream where the trails divide.

YESTERDAY

But the sun was low, as we rose to go,
And ah, it was cold and grey,
While the shadows of even were falling—
The evening of yesterday.

For the land of dreams is the long ago,
Where shadowy phantoms tread
Of a task undone and a prize unwon,
The gift that at noonday fled.
Though we turn again to its sunlit plain,
The glories are dimmed for aye,
And our castles are mingled with ashes,
The ashes of yesterday.

THE BREED

(A Song of the Brand)

*They who bear the brand of the lonely land
Must follow its lonely way
Through the long, long night, till the dawning light
Shall herald the break of day.
Cross the Arctic snows, where the north wind blows.
Or parched 'neath a burning sky,
To a call that was theirs since creation
They answer and know not why.*

I chain with the fetters that bind the soul,
I link with the links of time
And speak ere the cradle shall yield its child ;
I claim thee and thou art mine.
From palatial pomp to the reeking slum,
Midst classes and kinds I roam.
And I trust to their keeping mine honour,
Midst trails of the great alone.

How they smile with joy o'er the baby boy,
And plan him a future grand.
But I watch unseen, as I stand between,
To letter him with the brand.

THE BREED

Then I creep away to await the day
When idols and hopes shall fall,
And a wanderer turns to the desert,
Obeying my deathless call.

There are those who try to my power deny,
Defying my ancient law.
Who would e'en be free, as they turn to flee
Again to the paths of yore.
As I watch them go, in my heart I know
'Tis but to return again.
For the things that are, and the things that were
To them are no more the same.

They are mine for aye till their bones decay,
And others shall fill their trail.
They are mine to seek by the gorge and creek.
The South, or the Northland's veil.
They are mine to live, they are mine to die,
Predestined by fate's decree
To a choice that is not of their choosing.
Yet willing my sons to be.

For the seed is sown and they e'en must roam
My boundaries wild and wide
Till I bid them rest from an endless quest,
And sleep where the trails divide.

THE BREED

In the nameless graves where the big grass waves
And shadows of empire fall
They are sleeping the sleep of the ages,
Awaiting the last great call.

*'Twas so at the first, 'twill be to the last,
The wanderer still must roam.
For the fates decreed that the gypsy breed
Forever must trail alone.
In the silent land by the lonely fire,
Midst wilderness old and grey,
They are blending with dreams of to-morrow
"What might have been" yesterday.*

FOREVER

Do I dream, dear love, of the years that live
 In memory's sacred bower?
Do I vision again in the twilight,
 Midst quiet of the evening hour,
That I hold you close as in days that fled,
 And whisper "Dear love, dear love,"
While I fancy you murmur "Forever,"
 My girl, from your home above?

Do I speak to you vainly, my darling,
 And fancy I see you yet?
Do I dream, as the shadows are falling,
 Of words I can ne'er forget?
Do I cling to a hope that was broken,
 The wreck of what might have been?
Then, my darling, may God in His mercy
 Forever just let me dream.

L'ENVOI

And now to you whose story I have vainly tried to tell,
With lisping tongue and faltering pen, wherever you may dwell,
O'ershadowed by the Southern Cross, or camping in the wild,
The fellows who the city's rush and cares have ne'er defiled.

In weary lands I've seemed to roam again as yesterday.
And pierced the shadowed silence of the fallen in the fray.
O'er coulee, camp and mountain trail, I've dreamed with strange delight
And known again the wilderness, the hunger and the night.

You've known the luring of the East, the Himalayan Heights,
You've known the fevered Gold Coast, or the mystic Northern Lights.
You've played the game without the gain, but love the tie that binds,
The God above, the loneliness, ye makers of the lines.

L'ENVOI

I've spoken of the ones who pay, a grave out in the plain;
You tread the path they all have trod, and follow in their train;
From Egypt and the Upper Nile, to where the Rockies stand,
You've seen it all, you've heard the call, to civilize the land.

I bid farewell, for I have known, or seemed to for a spell,
Your faces in the wilderness, I seem to know you well;
I stretch again an eager hand to you, both far and near,
And thank you with a nation's thanks—the Civil Engineer.

